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ABSTRACT

Schooling has long reflected a bureaucratized, assembly line organization. The National Governors' Association has advocated a systematic restructuring of schools to increase student learning. This paper has four goals: (1) to define school restructuring; (2) to suggest how principals, teachers, and students may forge new relationships; (3) to suggest teacher collegial groups (TCGs) as an effective strategy for principals desiring to help staff assume challenging professional roles; and (4) to share some positive and some problematic results of a 2-year school site experiment with TCGs. Data collected through participant observation, focused interviewing, and questionnaires were analyzed, using qualitative case study techniques. Year 1 results showed that teachers improved their instruction through their TCG participation, although they had some difficulty formulating year-long foci and identifying game plans. In the second year, foci and game plans were subjected to content analysis; findings indicate that contrived collegiality might have occurred. Organizational cultures encouraging the norms of collegiality and experimentation may be difficult to institutionalize in schools. Further teacher collegiality research is needed. (13 references) (MLH)

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A Strategy to Develop Teacher Leadership for School Restructuring: Teacher Collegial Groups

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A Symposium: School-level leadership:
Some "how" elements in restructuring

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Abstract

The National Governors' Association (1990) advocated a systematic approach of fundamentally changing the ways schools are organized to significantly increase student learning (i.e., school restructuring). Principals, teachers, and students will forge new relationships in these restructured schools. A teacher collegial group was conceptualized and implemented as a strategy principals can use to prepare their staffs to assume new, challenging professional roles. Data describing two years of implementation research were described. In year 1, teachers through their TCG participation improved their instruction, although they encountered some difficulty in formulating year-long foci and identifying gameplans. In Year 2 foci and gameplans were subjected to content analysis; study findings indicated that contrived collegiality might have occurred. Organization cultures encouraging the norms of collegiality and experimentation may be difficult to institutionalize in schools.

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Some influential governors, legislators, and school and business leaders are convinced that the basic structure of schools must change if we are to reverse the current tide of student mediocrity. The National Governors' Association (Nathan, 1990) advocated a systematic approach of fundamentally changing the ways schools are organized to significantly increase student learning. Schools have reflected the assembly line organization structure (e.g., a standard schedule for all students). New structures will be conceptualized and implemented in which academic success for both disadvantaged and gifted is maximized. The public pressure for structural change in schooling may increase -- now that Lamar Alexander (formerly a leader in the National Governors' Association) has been nominated as secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

Introduction

This paper has a practitioner approach to the restructuring agenda: How do we transform individual schools into vibrant workplaces in which student achievement is the priority of all administrators and teachers? Since restructuring likely will require administrators and teachers to share the decision making, how can we develop leaders from the teacher ranks? To help meet this contingency a participatory structure known as a teacher collegial group (TCG) was designed and implemented during a

two-year study. During 1988-89 a school (Temple Elementary School, Carroll County, Georgia) and a college (West Georgia College) collaborated on the field testing of one TCG. In 1989-90 four TCGs were implemented.

Schools are busy places. Colleges/universities have the time to reflect and offer school improvement models (Goodlad, 1984) for schools to implement and adapt to their settings. The project director was also the group facilitator and investigator.

The paper has four purposes: 1) to define school restructuring; 2) to suggest how principals, teachers, and students may relate with each other in restructuring schools; 3) to suggest that the TCG is an effective strategy principals can use to prepare their staffs to take on new, challenging professional roles; and 4) to share some positive and some problematic results of two years of school-site experimenting with TCGs.

What Is School Restructuring?

Murphy (1990) concluded that restructuring movement dimensions fall into four areas: 1) school-based management (redistribution of authority from district level to school level); 2) teacher empowerment (which includes upgrading the quality of the work environment); 3) parent and student school choice (breaking up the consumer-insensitive monopoly); and 4) teaching for understanding (the shifting

from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction). How schools go about reorganizing the delivery of curriculum and instruction remains to be seen.

New Relationships for Tomorrow's Schools

Because principals are always on the hot seat (for instance, among a teacher, student, and parent over a detention policy), they would be impacted directly by any change in the time-honored, hierarchical structure. Traditionally, principals have told teachers what to do. Teachers have dispensed essential information to students. Two influences will change these relationships: an organization influence and a technological influence.

Schools as Collaborative Workplaces

The individual school will replace the school district as the primary administrative unit. School-based management and shared decision-making reflect a global, decentralized decision-making trend. Each school's teachers and administrators will have the autonomy to design their own curricula -- provided their students can demonstrate knowledge and skills specified by state education agencies (SEAs). The Task Force on Teaching (1986) suggests one model in which a representative group of teachers in each school hires the principal responsible for only administrative tasks. A teacher committee (representing the

entire faculty) would be responsible for instructional decisions.

The United States may adopt a national curriculum or, at least, a national assessment system capable of judging student product at the performance level (Rothman, 1990). If student learning becomes measurable at the national level, individual schools then could become market-driven. The sole criterion of school success would be student performance. In the open-marketplace concept, each workplace group of teachers and administrators would define their school mission, vision, and product to enroll students -- possibly as "specialty schools." Schools unable to define their mission and attract students, or schools whose students demonstrate inadequate student outcomes, would be closed down. (This is a chilling thought to many educators. One observer predicting this scenario was Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers and a militant activist of the 1960s.) Parent choice, vouchers, and tuition tax credits would accelerate this phenomenon.

Telecommunication and Its Effect on Student-Centered Learning

Telecommunication can be considered the distribution device of the Information Age (Mecklenberger, 1990). Media centers are becoming obsolete, and so perhaps are many textbooks. Advances in fiber optics "pipe" information into

classrooms and will be accessible to all students using keyboards to provide information specific to their needs. Some students use classroom computers to send and share data on space travel experiments with other schools. Students in Spanish classes "chat" electronically with other computer users in Latin America. Students in Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Florida use the National Geographic Society's Kids' Net to share data on acid rain (Watson 1990). With information increasingly becoming more packaged and accessible, a student interested in killer bees or acid rain will very quickly know more than the teacher.

Ultimately technological advances will encourage, stimulate, and even force teachers to change from the traditional dispenser of information to facilitator or manager of learning. Whether we are ready or not, teachers will have to change their roles: Unable to keep up with the availability of information, they will no longer be dispensers of information. With information arrays so accessible, student inquiry learning (designed as student-oriented work projects) inevitably will complement end-of-chapter worksheets.

A New Challenge for Principals

The "effective" principals will be those whose schools are successful with <u>all</u> children. Their students will demonstrate that they know <u>how to use information</u>.

Principals' perceived effectiveness will become dependent upon energetic, entrepreneurial, and risk-taking teachers.

Most schools now are over-bureaucratized. Entangled in a bewildering mesh of policy, rules, and regulations, they lack the flexibility to change the essential schooling relationships. So some pro-education governors -- influenced by recommendations made by some outstanding principals of the Governors' Task Force on School Leadership -- made a potentially monumental horse trade. These principals were willing to be held accountable for student outcomes if they could be given the flexibility and authority to make critical decisions affecting their schools (Nathan, 1990). Savvy principals -- always on the "hot seat" -- are picking up on this message and are planning for drastic change <u>now</u>.

An obvious place to start is working with teachers in new ways. Teachers are the lifeblood of any school. They interact all day long both with principals and other teachers. Whereas principals have been considered the tone-setters of effective schools, teachers will set the tone for the successful schools of the 1990s. A major problem is that in many schools teachers have been isolated in their classrooms and have had little opportunity to share successful instructional strategies with each other. Many teachers no doubt want to influence the quality of their workplaces. They may, however, lack the experience of

interacting with other adults. One strategy principals can use to promote new collegial relationships among teachers is the teacher collegial group.

Teacher Collegial Groups: A Definition

Teacher collegial groups provide a school's teachers most committed to changing and improving their teaching an opportunity to be learners in the teaching process (Keedy, 1990; 1991). TCGs can take several formats, and are based partly on Kelley's workshop learning (Kelley, 1950) and Kent's work (Kent, 1985). In this particular format, each teacher formulates a year-long focus for this series of meetings -- usually eight to ten per year. The ideal number of teachers is between six and eight. A primary-grade teacher might want to use more time developing small group problem-solving skills. A history teacher might want to use cooperative learning groups encouraging more student analysis of historical issues.

These teachers deliberate upon alternatives to established practice. Teachers become action researchers and try out their "gameplans." (A "gameplan" is an incremental step listing strategies to be followed for two-four weeks to improve upon their year-long focus). At each TCG meeting teachers update group members on progress made on their gameplan established at the previous TCG meeting. This collegial interaction results in the

formulation of another gameplan to be tested out for the next two-four weeks preceding the next meeting. As this cycle continues, teachers become analysts, problem-solvers, and informal researchers of their own teaching styles. (See Figure 1 for the procedure.) Group members learn both from this cycle of experimentation with different instructional strategies and from each other through group interaction. Experienced teachers collaborate on the renewal of their teaching by reflecting upon their work in the learning -teaching process.

Methodology and Data Sources

Both studies used qualitative case study to analyze the data (Weber, 1970). Six teachers (n=6) participated in the Year 1 study; 24 teachers (n=24) participated in the Year 2 study. Through naturalistic inquiry based on the teacher study groups literature, the researcher observed appropriate behaviors and examined how TCGs could become a vehicle for improved teacher professionalism. Data collected through participant observation, focused interviewing (Spradley, 1979), and questionnaire were analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted for congruency among data sets, e.g., Erickson's "triangulation of the data" (1986).

Figure 1

ANALYSIS/CRITIQUE FORMAT FOR TCG PRESENTATIONS

John L. Keedy West Georgia College

(1) Statement of last meeting's Game-plan.

(2) Presentor description, analysis, and critique of Game-plan implementation.

(3) Peer observation analysis/critique.

(4) Group analysis/critique to identify assessment of Year-long Focus.

(5) Group advice/suggestions, encouragement, support for new Game-plan.

(6) Presentor formulation of new Game-plan.

Other data were follow-up interviews (six for each study); questionnaire data; and field notes (based on direct observation of each group and program artifacts, such as progress reports written by the group facilitators). Content analyses also were used for year 2 to analyze teacher-identified year-long foci (criteria: scope and practitioner orientation) and gameplans [criteria: appropriateness for year-long foci and logical continuity (n=18)].

Year 1 Results: Did Teachers -- As Participants in Teacher Collegial Groups-- Improve Their Instruction?

Year-long foci and gameplans (as adopted by the participating teachers) were analyzed. Case studies of teacher self-improvements were constructed. (The comprehensive report contains charted gameplans of all six teachers -- as opposed to the one used in this report.)

Charting of Year-Long Focus and Gameplans

Not until the third meeting did all teachers formulate a year-long focus. They also experienced some difficulty in differentiating the focus from the meeting-to-meeting gameplans. This difficulty is partly conceptual: These teachers have never had the opportunity to choose areas for self-improvement. Members in the second meeting did not apparently believe it necessary to interact or to help each

other on the year-long focus or to differentiate that from their gameplan. No one spoke up and said, "You are confusing gameplan and year-long focus". This might have related to the norm that a teacher as a professional is responsible for his or her own classroom. Everyone is on his or her own.

Two areas dominated teacher selection of year-long foci. The first related to classroom organization (e.g., pacing a classroom instruction and meeting the needs of students at either end of the learning rate spectrum--slow or fast). Becky, for instance, had two very fast students way ahead of the other twenty-five students. She used this problem as her year-long focus. (Table 1 contains the charting of Becky's gameplans.) The other general area of teacher inquiry was motivating students.

Synopses of Case Studies

Six case studies were used to synthesize data collected by follow-up interviews and teacher meeting assessment instruments, and analysis of field notes and meeting transcripts. Synopses of these case studies, including each teacher's year-long focus for these case studies follow.

Becky: To provide a more structured extension of assignments for her gifted children. The group members helped Becky set realistic expectations for her students

wide range of learning needs. Gifted students, she discovered, needed considerable structure and consistency.

Table 1

Charting of Gameplan Formulation - Becky

Year-long focus	Provide a more structured extension of assignments for my gifted children.
Gameplans	Meetings #2 - #8
#2	Start daily personal journal with two gifted students.
#3	Using more specific topics in personal journals.
#4	Vary assignments for gifted students so they don t get bored.
#5	Individualize activities for my male fast learner by using learning center games.
#6	Structure learning activities for gifted so that they do specific activities on each day.
#7	Use silent reading with bookworm to motivate individual study skills.
#8	Chart the amount of time spent with the gifted group. Try cooperative group with David and Amanda and work Laura in later.
#9	Continued with SSR and Bookworm.

Primary-age gifted/fast learners often lack independent work habits associated with older students. Essentially, she learned how to better use her time while meeting needs of regular students and fast learners.

Brenda: To incorporate cooperative learning circles into her combined 1-2 grade classroom. Brenda learned that implementing cooperative learning groups for primary-grade children was a perilous endeavor. After a few only moderately successful strategies, she discovered using pairs and then combining the most cooperative pairs into groups of fours. Convinced that she would use these groups next year, this teacher stated that "... it [TCGs] forced me to learn another way of teaching". The project "...was encouraging because I could listen to the interesting methods the other teachers used".

Debbie: To better use the state-mandated remedial education time with her reading groups. This teacher's journal and meeting transcripts contained several strategies used to meet state requirements to teach her remedial students and to teach "regular" students. One strategy was a creative rearrangement of desks to group the remedial students. At the fifth meeting Debbie implemented cooperative learning centers both to reduce the paperwork and to motivate her remedial students. ("I've been thinking of trying these centers for six years.") Debbie related that her colleagues influenced her to: (a) "ask herself continuously if she was

motivating students"; and (b) encouraged her to do things differently that she would not have done without the group. She had always been willing to change her teaching; her TCG experience, however, gave her the opportunity to listen to "what was working well with the other teachers." "I sat at my desk less and was less of a 'traditional teacher'. I started 'teaching'. I planned more activities and gave out less worksheets."

Evelyn: To improve her students' vocabulary skills. In implementing strategies to increase her students' vocabulary skills, Evelyn learned not to expect 100% correct from all students. Her colleagues convinced her that this expectation was not practical ("Why beat your head against the wall?"). Also, varying strategies prevented students from becoming bored. Instead of overusing a particular vocabulary strategy, (while it was working) she decided to use four or five strategies mixing them up during a week's time. These strategies often worked best with smaller groups. (This overall strategy was especially true for this teacher's class this year. "It just happened to be a rather 'loud' class," observed a peer observer from the collegial group.) This teacher believed that the group helped her with the suggestions for strategies to try out with her class.

Randy: To encourage his students to read independently. Randy revised his original year-long focus to use Sustained Silent Reading [SSR] during the fifth meeting. He spent the remaining meetings experimenting with implementation strategies: incentives encouraging student reading, and monitoring student progress to make sure students were actually reading the books. All but two of his approximately twenty-eight students read at least two books during his project. The group influenced this teacher to be more reflective on his teaching: "I didn't end up doing the same things all the time." He changed his teaching ("trying different things") and did not worry if they didn't work out because he had the support of his [respected] colleagues. The success of his sustained silent reading project is testimony to this teacher's willingness to try different strategies.

Kathy: To provide a smoother transition time as Special Education students enter and leave her classroom between 10:45 and 11:45. This special education teacher had students with different subject areas, handicapping conditions, and learning levels. Developing an efficient classroom management system enabled this teacher to stay with the students she was working with instead of being constantly interrupted as students entered and left her classroom. She learned to focus her efforts on one student at a time, to use the computer as an incentive for student

compliance to her management system, and to focus directly on one problem and to deal with it--before moving on.

Conclusions of Year 1 Study.

With judicious planning and district/school-level support, teacher collegial groups can be successful. Teachers can help and learn from each other as they individually change and improve their teaching. During this exploratory study, a meeting format and a procedure were developed which improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the TCG process. Teachers can improve through this TCG process: They can institute new strategies such as cooperative learning groups and learning centers, which they (hopefully) will continue to use in their classrooms. Teachers experienced difficulty, however, in formulating year-long foci and identifying meeting-to-meeting gameplans.

Year 2 Results:

Exploring the TCG Effects upon School Culture

Three questions were studied. Each question and its results follows.

1) Did the TCG model encourage participants to be reflective practitioners?

Teachers successfully identified year-long foci and formulated gameplans related to implementing these foci. The gameplans, however, lacked logical continuity (from one gameplan to another); many gameplan sets were analyzed as

isolated activities instead of demonstrating a progressive cohesion toward focused improvements. Observations of the four TCGs confirmed that teachers followed the procedure but rarely engaged each other about assessment of overall progress; in their presentations teachers rarely provided sufficient classroom context for their colleagues to help with this assessment. Teacher daily-to-weekly reflection about teaching practices increased during this program.

2) Did the TCG culture among group members become more collegial?

The cultures both developed within the group and among participants interacting outside the TCG were characterized by more sharing of materials and mutual help towards accomplishing gameplans after completing the TCG program. Teacher isolation and classroom autonomy were less perceived as hindrances to collegial sharing and support after TCG participation. Peer observation and frequency of discussing teaching practices outside of the TCG, however, did not increase during the TCG program.

3) Did teachers change their established teaching practices during the TCG process?

Teachers changed in three ways. Through group encouragement "to try different things," teacher fears of "losing classroom control" lessened. Second, teachers were influenced by TCG peer pressure to research each gameplan and be prepared to present at each meeting. Third, the

frequency of discussions with colleagues--especially about ideas perceived to have the greatest potential of success with students--influenced teacher change; the TCG procedure helped teachers overcome their isolation from each other. Teachers' agreement that change was too difficult because teachers become used to routines, however, increased during the TCG program.

Conclusion and Speculation of Year 2 Study.

This study was successful in that TCGs were well received by teachers and administrators. The school board will fund substitutes to provide release time for participating teachers for the third year. (A high school principal wants to be group facilitator next year). Teacher reflection, a sharing culture, and encouragement for teacher change to some extent occurred during the TCG program.

Yet this conclusion does not necessarily mean that teachers became more analytical and reflective about their work. "Contrived collegiality," as opposed to "collaborative culture" (Hargraves cited by Fullan, 1990) may have occurred during this field study. This implication is based on the mixed results for each question. Fullan (1990) speculated that traditional school cultures were hard to influence, and this study confirms this view. The TCG program represented a technical framework which the data support as "implemented". Following procedures and

exhibiting characteristics of group collegiality and teacher change is not synonymous with internalizing practitioner reflection and instituting a collaborative group culture supporting teacher change.

Study Implications for School Restructuring: The Fight Against Time

Teachers will be the cornerstone in the restructured schools of the future. A proposition in this paper was that teacher relationships both with principals and their students essentially will be collegial and collaborative. Principals and teachers will work together as a problem-solving unit intent on reorganizing their schools to better meet their student learning needs. Teachers will be classroom managers empowering their students with choice and responsibility for their own learning.

But how do we start forming these relationships? As with many things, principals can set a new building tone by using strategies such as teacher collegial groups. By forming collegial relationships first among themselves, teachers will be better equipped to relate with principals and students collegially. In the Year 1 study, a TCG was implemented successfully: Teachers individually improved their instruction.

The Year 2 data, however, imply that we have a long way to go to prepare teachers for collaborative roles with

principals. Teachers were influenced by the TCG format to share and reflect with each other. Yet individually, they continued to experience difficulty with the analysis and reflection processes. In school restructuring, teachers logically must be both analytical and reflective about their work. Otherwise how can we expect them to share decision making with principals?

These studies' findings imply that program implementation is far easier than setting the norms of analysis and reflection among teachers. Workplace culture (including organization willingness to change) should be on the main agenda for local and state education agencies. Yet the clock ticks away. If principals do not start implementing strategies encouraging these processes now (while there's time), state legislators may wave magic wands, and restructuring elements like school-based management and parent choice will be at our doorsteps. Will schools be ready?

Suggestions for Further Research

Questions raised for further study on workplace culture include: 1) How can we develop reliable and valid measurements of teacher collegiality? (A modification of the Flanders Interaction Analysis System might be used to categorize interactions among participants); 2) How can state education agencies encourage districts to implement

models such as TCGs?; and 3) How do we get principals to actively support these collegial opportunities for teachers? (Two schools not appearing to have the solid backing of their principals dropped out of the program during the second year.)

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